

ADHD & Sleep

Children with ADHD can have specific difficulties with sleep. They may:

- Find it harder to fall asleep
- Have trouble staying asleep
- Resist bedtime

Your goal at bedtime is to help your child wind down and get to sleep at a usual time. Research shows that children with regular bedtime routines get to sleep sooner and awaken less often during the night than those without them. Many children with ADHD fight bedtime because, quite simply, going to bed is boring to them. It's time for sleep, but there's still so much they can do! Routines that offer rewards and pleasant activity while encouraging relaxation can help overcome the boredom of bedtime.

Before you start adjusting your nightly routine, it helps to know how many hours of rest to aim for. Here's how much sleep most people need at different ages:

- Infants: Nine to 10 hours at night, plus three or more hours of naps
- Toddlers: Nine to 10 hours at night, plus two to three hours of naps
- School-age children: Nine to 11 hours
- Adults: Seven to eight hours

Tips for Making Bedtime Easier

Create consistent sleep-wake routines.

Research has found some evidence to suggest that children with ADHD do not produce enough melatonin, the body's natural hormone to aid with sleep. Without enough melatonin, a child simply may not feel sleepy at bedtime. Some children may have delays in the timing of the release of melatonin. You can help regulate melatonin production in your child by creating consistent bedtimes and wake times — even on weekends. Because this helps to regulate the brain's natural sleep rhythms and the release of melatonin, you'll find that bedtimes get easier.

Establish a bedtime routine.

All children thrive on routines and structures, but children with ADHD need structure in order to function at their best. This is also true at bedtime.

Two hours before bedtime:

Children with ADHD need longer, darker, and quieter bedtime routines in order to relax and prepare for sleep compared to other children. Children with ADHD benefit from quiet activities, such as reading, rather than more stimulating activities. All electronic devices, such as phones, tablets, and televisions, should be shut off at least an hour (preferably two) before bedtime. (This is because blue screens can affect the circadian rhythm.) Parents should dim the lights and encourage quiet activities. Some children benefit from reading time with their parent. Not only is this soothing, but it's a great way to bond!

It may be tempting to try to wear your children out before bed out, but it can have the reverse effect. So, if you can, try to avoid physical activity leading up to sleep time. Instead, you could opt for more calming fine motor skill activities for them to do.

Example of fine motor skills activities include:

- Jigsaws
- Craft activities
- Colouring in

One hour before bedtime:

- Parents should start bedtime routines at least an hour before you desire your child to be asleep.
- Children should be encouraged to:
 - Take a relaxing bath (unless they bathe in the morning as part of wake-up routine)
 - Brush their teeth
 - Get a small drink of water
 - Use the bathroom
 - Get into pyjamas

Get to bed on time – 15-30 mins before bed

Finally for the ADHD sleep routine to work, your child needs to get to bed on time. Now that your child has prepared for bed, you need to make sure they lie down in bed at the same time each night. Your child should know their bedtime, and you should do what you can to stick to it each night.

Studies show that a regular bedtime provides health benefits for children. Your child's body gets used to when bedtime should be. The more you change the routine, though, the less and less effective the ADHD sleep routine will be. To help your child sleep best, make every effort to get them in bed at a consistent time.

The bedtime might be different for different households. Whether bedtime comes at 7:00 pm or 8:00 or 8:30 pm, keep the time consistent and don't make exceptions except in rare instances. To ensure that your child gets to bed on time, you should get them in the bedroom 15-30 mins before the scheduled time.

The bedtime should be the time that the light goes off and you leave the room for them to sleep. In the 15-30 mins before that time, you need to get them into the room and bed. You can read them a story at this time and help them wind down by talking about the day or what they plan to do when they wake up. Your goal needs to be making sure they lie down and can't delay going to bed any longer.

Drown out ambient noise and light.

Children with ADHD are easily distracted by extraneous noise and light, even when trying to sleep. Use of a white noise machine or a fan to drown out noise can be beneficial if regular

household noises are keeping your child awake. Light in the bedroom during sleep time should be limited to a small nightlight.

Room temperature

Keep bedroom cool - around 16-18 degrees is helpful

Have a supper time snack

If your child takes medication for their ADHD, it may suppress their appetite. This can mean they wake due to hunger in the night. Adding in supper time to their bedtime routine may help. Slow-release carbohydrates such as porridge make a great bedtime snack.

Keep the bedroom calm

Children with ADHD often have sensory processing issues. Think about whether your child is particularly sensitive to noise or light and how this may impact their sleep.

Here are some strategies you can try:

- A white noise machine may help to mask background noise
- Blackout curtains may stop early waking's by blocking light entering the room
- Close the curtains in the run up to bedtime - this can help their body create melatonin, the sleep hormone.

Praise good behaviour

Remember to praise your child during the routine and reinforce what they have done well. For example, you could say: "Well done for turning off your Xbox so calmly" "Well done for brushing your teeth".

Try using a timetable

Bedtime resistance is a common issue in all children and particularly those who have an ADHD diagnosis. Some youngsters find using a visual timetable helps them to know what's coming next and feel calmer during the routine.

Use a visual cue

Think about using a visual cue in the bedroom so that your child knows when it's time to get up. A lamp on a timer switch works well. This teaches them that when the light is off it's still sleep time and when the light is on, they can get up.

Exercise & sunshine

Daytime exercise can help children and adults fall asleep more easily at night. When possible, encourage bike rides, long walks, swimming, etc after school or on weekend mornings or afternoons. That way, exercise will be less likely to interfere with winding down at bedtime. During the day, aim for at least 30 minutes of exposure to sunlight. You might walk the dog with your child or bike together to the shops. If possible, try to get an hour of bright morning sunlight. This can help regulate sleep patterns.

Treat the senses.

Scents like lavender and chamomile are proven sleep-inducers. Try a pillow spray or a scented body lotion.